

## COLONIAL PERIOD

*Bartolomé de Las Casas*. Vol. I. *Delegado de Cisneros para la re-formación de las Indias (1516-1517)*. By MANUEL GIMÉNEZ FERNÁNDEZ. Sevilla, 1953. Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, Publicación 70. Plates. Appendices. Index. Pp. xxvi, 766.

The demands upon the biographer of Las Casas are unusually severe, which is doubtless why we have not hitherto had anything even approaching a satisfactory full-length life. Quite apart from the relative obscurity of his private life, much material relevant to his public career remains unpublished; understanding of the man and his ideas requires close familiarity with the ideological, political and economic conflicts over the way to develop the New World, and with an intricate complex of government officials, churchmen, colonists and court factions in Spain, Flanders and the Indies; and the difficulties of maintaining proper historical balance and of rendering due justice to all parties in the great debate on the Indian question are formidable.

Of this first installment of a projected six-volume life of Fray Bartolomé, three things must be said at once: Giménez Fernández is a well-known Spanish authority on sixteenth-century America; his approach, significantly, is intensely sympathetic; and when completed his work will, by reason of its massive documentation, meticulous coverage and brilliant presentation, unquestionably rank as the long-needed definitive biography. Fresh, original insights into Spanish and Ibero-American history are here combined with a wealth of new archival material, drawn from the Archivo General de Indias and the Archivo de Protocolos at Seville; and the 263-page "Catálogo Documental," listing chronologically all published and manuscript sources cited, with copious extracts from the latter, will be of prime utility to all students of the early colonial period.

Only two years, 1516-1517, of Las Casas' long, crowded lifetime are described in this initial volume, the period of his first appearance on the Spanish national scene as the foremost champion of Indian rights. The few known facts about his earlier history are deftly summarized from the author's previous researches, but interest speedily focuses upon that remarkable biennium when Las Casas was the inspirer and collaborator of the cardinal-regent Ximenes de Cisneros in their attempted transformation of the Indian forced labor system through the here aptly styled Plan Cisneros. Cisneros indeed looms even larger than Las Casas in these pages; and one of the book's

many merits is its richly documented reconstruction of the partnership of the two religious idealists.

Giménez Fernández presents the events of 1516-1517 as in effect a three-act tragedy, staged in Spain, Flanders and America, and centering about the struggle of Cisneros and Las Casas to free the Indies, and above all the Indians, from the vicious domination of the colonial bureaucrats appointed to office under *el Rey Católico*. This Fernandine governing clique is depicted as made up of Aragonese, Conversos and (to the author's infinite regret) a few unworthy Castilians, headed by Fonseca, Conchillos, Matienzo and Pasamonte. Book One ("Orto") repeatedly and scathingly denounces this "fauna aragonesa" or "marranalla" as responsible for all the ills of the Indies: despotic misgovernment; avaricious fortune-hunting; absentee landlordism and *emigración golondrina*; demoralizing mining and commercial ventures; and, above all, the enslavement, brutal exploitation and rapid extermination of the natives of the Caribbean. The Christian humanitarian reaction to these conditions is traced from its rise among the Española Dominicans to its expression by Las Casas, whose return to Spain coincided with the creation by the Cisnerian regency of conditions favorable to reform.

Book Two ("Cenit") submits to the most detailed examination yet made Cisneros' famous Jeronymite mission to the Antilles. The inception of this project is regarded as the result of Las Casas' three *memoriales* to the cardinal, describing the horrors of the encomienda system and the urgency of remedial action; and of the Madrid Junta of May 1516, before which the case for and against the system was argued in Cisneros' presence. It is made evident that the latter, although agreeing in principle with the Lascasian doctrine of Indian freedom, aimed not at an utopian liberation of all Indians but at purging Fernandine officials, eliminating enslavement, and converting Indian labor conscription into a paternalistic type of serfdom based upon an agrarian rather than a mining economy. Detailed consideration is given to the choice of the three Jeronymite commissioners (whose powers are proved to have been reformist, not gubernatorial) and to the designation of Zuazo as *juez visitador* and of Las Casas himself as *procurador de los Indios*. There follows the fullest analysis yet undertaken of the voluminous *Instrucciones* drawn up to guide the three commissioners, whom Giménez Fernández, differing from both Serrano y Sanz' favorable and Hanke's more neutral judgment, bitterly indicts for having sold out to the Fernandinos and encomenderos even before sailing from Spain.

In Book Three ("Ocaso") the tragedy reaches its climax in the inevitable failure of the Plan Cisneros. With the Jeronymites in Española hostile to Las Casas and fraternizing with their presumed foes, and with young Charles V in Flanders falling under the baneful domination of the Aragonese-Converso-Flamenco faction, reform along Cisnerian, not to say Lascasian, lines became manifestly impossible. In defeatist mood the octogenarian cardinal agreed to a revision of the reform Plan which was tantamount to a capitulation to the opposition. With his death a few months later, leaving Las Casas to carry on the fight under greatly increased odds, this volume closes.

Giménez Fernández' masterly and deeply moving reconstruction of this inaugural phase of Las Casas' lifelong campaign to win the Spanish state to the cause of Indian reform, marks a new climactic in the Lascasian Renaissance of recent decades. But on the interpretative side the book displays certain weaknesses that may be briefly suggested. For one thing, as a strongly partisan portrayal it lies open to the charge—and not only from confirmed anti-Lascasians—of bias inevitable in an *historia apologética*. Again, some of the basic assumptions underlying evaluation of the documents appear more than dubious. Too sharp a contrast, for example, is insisted upon between the benevolent, constitution-loving, agrarian, Indophile Castilians (of whom Cisneros and Las Casas are made to appear unduly typical) and their opponents, who are consistently denounced as greedy, despotic, unscrupulous, commercially minded Aragonese-Marranos or renegade Castilians of similarly despicable type. This leads to an emotional rather than realistic appraisal of sixteenth-century Spanish capitalism, which overlooks Sevillian mercantile interests and accepts at face value the rather utopian seigneurial paternalism of the Cisnerians. Furthermore, in stressing—as Las Casas and Cisneros themselves did not—an ethnico-religious opposition to the Plan, the author ignores the cardinal's close association with Conversos in his religious reforms, Polyglot edition and inquisitorial functions; and places excessive reliance on the *limpieza* argument, that favorite weapon of Castilian polemicists of the day seeking to belabor Ferdinand V and the still shaky *España de la Unidad*. But even more misleading is the fact that narrow concentration upon the clash of Las Casas and Cisneros with the Fernandinos grossly underestimates the central role of the encomenderos and other colonists—*castellanos de pura sangre*—whose opposition to Lascasian abolitionism was quite as violent as that of the Fernandinos themselves, and with whose harsh difficulties in primitive America the Jeronymites came, not altogether inexcusably, to sympathize.

Another unfortunate feature of the book is its tendency in many places to regard as identical the doctrinal positions and policies of its two chief protagonists, although elsewhere these are properly distinguished. This failure to keep always in mind the gap between Las Casas' radical libertarianism and Cisneros' relatively conservative ameliorism and greater sense of political realism, seriously distorts at times the analysis and assessment of the facts adduced. For instance, the harsh condemnation of the Jeronymites as plain traitors to Cisneros and the Plan may be somewhat justifiable, but the degree of justification cannot be validly determined by passing judgment within a Lascasian rather than a Cisnerian frame of reference. After all, the priors were carefully selected for their known moderation in social and economic questions; and their *Instrucciones* pointed in the direction they more or less followed. Nor does it seem altogether convincing to entitle Las Casas "delegado de Cisneros para la reforma de las Indias." Granted the close collaboration of the two men in the preparation of the reform program, it yet remains significant that it was the Jeronymites, not Las Casas, who were commissioned to carry it out. Las Casas was named attorney for the defense, because the court desired to give the plaintiffs the ablest possible counsel, but this did not mean delegation of power to act in the regent's name.

In Giménez Fernández' second volume, the publication of which will be eagerly awaited, the reviewer would like to see some clarification of these doubts that qualify his otherwise profound admiration of this monumental study.

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*Cuauhtémoc*. By SALVADOR TOSCANO. Prologue by RAFAEL HELIODORO VALLE. Mexico City, 1953. Fondo de Cultura Económica. Illustrations. Pp. 210.

In the United States and other English-speaking nations, Cuauhtémoc is a less celebrated figure than his father-in-law and predecessor on the Mexican throne, Montezuma. In Mexico itself this is no longer the case. To the popular mind of present-day Mexico Cuauhtémoc represents the indigenous resistance against Cortés. Cuauhtémoc, the modern culture hero, has appropriated all of the symbolically tragic personality that the outside world still attributes to Montezuma. In the purity of his youth Cuauhtémoc waged a patriotic battle; he employed all his forces and lost; he suffered a cruel martyrdom but through his ordeal preserved the dignity and honor that make his